10: Marshall M-5 (ca. 1910) 1945 AP1 Burma
Karen AP7

243 412 ploughing. Almost always they used the small wooden plough, sometimes tipped with iron. I have seen a herd of six or eight buffaloes driven around and around over the muddy ground as a method of preparing it for receiving the seed.

As soon as the rain had softened the ground the rice or, more properly, the paddy would be planted by hand, being poked into the ground with a sharp stick. The Karens invented few tools for their work and did not readily adopt those used by other peoples. They ● 241 weeded with rude hoes, or with sticks and fingers. As the crop matured, they had to fight many varieties of animals and birds. They would construct rude fences of bamboo to keep out wild pig and deer. To protect themselves from the birds they strung small ropes made of various fibres around the field and attached bamboo clappers and later tin cans or anything that would make a noise. It was the duty of the women or small boys to sit in the central hut where they lived during the time of cultivation and pull these strings to drive away the marauding birds which came in large flocks to get their fill of the succulent, newly-formed rice.

251 243 The rice was reaped by hand using a sickle with a long curved handle, and then the grain was beaten out against a bamboo bar fixed to standards set up in the ground. The wind was the winnowing machine. The grain was stored in paddy bins prepared for it until it was needed for supplying the daily table. Often these bins would be located part way between the cultivation and the village site and they were not molested for there [577] is an innate honesty among the Karens that respects that to which they have become accustomed.

10: Marshall M-5 (ca. 1910) 1945 AP1 Burma
Karen AP7

In the early 1900's many Karens who had cleared immense tracts of land raised large crops of paddy and became well-to-do. It was then that they employed many Burman and Indian coolies to work for them. They built substantial houses, often of teak, or in a few instances of brick. Some of them were able to add field to field and became really wealthy. It was at this time that money-lenders became very active and going about the villages imposed loans of easy money on the unsuspecting cultivators. These loans were then allowed to lie idle for a year or two until the interest, set at exorbitant rates, mounted to nearly double the original loans, when a sudden demand for full payment could not be met; and the results were that the lending sharks foreclosed on the rich paddy-fields. In this way many a Karen who was once a prosperous cultivator became a tenant on land that he had previously owned. This process continued until near the time of the invasion and the property, land, houses and cattle of the Karens as well as of Burman cultivators, were largely in the hands of absentee landlords. The Indian Tamil Chettiars were the most numerous class of money-lenders and most exacting in demanding their pounds of flesh.

In only a few cases have the Karens proved to be good traders. They are too soft-hearted and often sell on credit which they feel embarrassed to collect, and therefore they soon fail. The shops in the Karen villages in the hills are most often kept by the Shans who are born traders. On the plains the Chinese have found the Karen villages good places to make money. They begin in a small way and soon, by lending money, collecting their debts by foreclosing on the land, and sometimes by selling

10: Marshall M-5 (ca. 1910) 1945 AP1 Burma
Karen AP7

among different tribes. In many of the more civilized sections they are no longer carefully observed. Christians do not resort to them.

Sex irregularities are believed to be most abhorrent to the *bgha* and are reputed to have been the cause of most trouble. Among the Bwès they are considered to cause the drying up of land and the failure of crops, and are therefore most severely punished by the elders when discovered. In their primitive state the Karens were unusually free from fornication and adultery. The recent transition period, with the breaking down of old customs and before Western ideals have been established, has seen some relaxation of these conditions.

The old epic song about *Ywa*, the Father God and Creator, and this belief in the existence of God are found among all the tribes. It does not, however, play an important part in their daily lives which are taken up with their struggles with the ever-present *nats* and demons.

Those Karens who were in closest contact with the Burmans, as for example the Pwo Karens, took on a thin veneer of Buddhism and went to the pagodas at the full moon and the quarters, but as a rule it was largely a social conforming that did not have a deep spiritual content.

VI

LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

Karen is an agglutinated monosyllabic language belonging to the Sinic family of languages. Like the Chinese it has tones which are important in learning to speak it, for the same sound may have entirely different

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CHAPTER X

AGRICULTURAL PURSUITS AND OTHER OCCUPATIONS

In the Hills

The Karen's chief occupation is the cultivation of the most important article of his diet, namely, rice. Throughout the Orient this grain is called "paddy" during all the stages of its growth and curing, until it is husked and polished ready for cooking. The method of cultivation in the hills is widely different from that on the plains. We shall consider the former first, as it is more primitive and, until recently, was practiced by far the larger number of the people. In Burma this more primitive method is often spoken of as the "ya" cultivation, from the Burmese word designating it. It is characteristic of this cultivation that a new hill field, called "hku" in Karen, has to be selected, cleared, and burned off each year. The planting of the grain must follow immediately after all seeds and small roots have been destroyed by fire, or no crop can be raised with the primitive implements in use, on account of the rapid resuscitation of the jungle. The ashes from the consumed vegetation act as a fertilizer, without which the crop would scarcely be worth the reaping. At the present time the Government so limits the areas open to the Karen for cultivation in some districts that a sufficient interval does not elapse between plantings to allow the growth of enough timber for the production of the ashes necessary to fertilize the soil properly. Hence, crop production is declining in these districts. At least seven years should intervene before a plot is cleared and planted a second time, and even this period is too short for the production of the best crops.[1]

[1]The "ya" cultivation, it is obvious, is most destructive of the forests. Unsuccessful efforts have been put forth to induce the Karen in the hills to give it up. It has been suggested that the people keep gardens and raise produce for sale. This proposal overlooks the lack of adequate roads for transporting the crops to market. The Karen are backward about engaging in new undertakings. They raise their food and obtain what else they need by barter. Until recently this mode of living has sufficed for them. They have not been accustomed to handling money or thinking it best long.

With the introduction of new ideas and the increase of mining concessions and forest restrictions, changes are inevitable and should be planned for, especially as the granting of new mining concessions will increase the number of outsiders. It has seemed to the present writer that "ya" cultivation might be limited to a term of years, during which a number of British

19: Marshall M-5 (ca. 1910) 1922 AP1 Burma
Karen AP7

243 [361] 787 423 When a crop has been harvested, the village chief and elders choose the ground to be cut over the following year. Each village has its well-recognized farming areas, beyond which are the lands of the neighboring village. Each member of the communtiy then picks out his particular plot for cultivating, takes home a lump of the earth, puts it under his pillow, and sleeps on it. If he has an auspicious dream, he consults the chicken bones for a confirmation of the good omen. Securing this confirmation, he regards his choice as fixed. Otherwise, he selects another plot and repeats the ceremonies. Once his selection is approved by the auspices, the spot is called a "du la," and he clears a little space on the land, after which he addresses the spirits as follows:

[539]

"Depart all you evil spirits ('ta we ta na').
We are going to work here for our food,
To get sustenance for our wife and children.
Let no sickness come upon us.
We are going to work until it is finished."

Next he places a lump of soil on the clearing and, having wrapped the chicken bones in the leaf of a creeper ("ki ku"), he touches the lump with them, raises them towards the sky, and again touches or strikes the clod with the mystic bones. He now breaks these apart and scrapes them until he can insert splints of bamboo into the holes of the bones. If this act of divination is also successful, he is ready for work.

241 243 In the early days, when much of the primeval forest was still standing, the Karen would clear out the brush and bamboos from among the giant trees on the hillside they were preparing to cultivate. Then they raised platforms at the foot of the trees from which they could cut them above the broad-spreading buttresses at their base, leaving enough of the trunk intact to keep them from falling. When the whole hillside tract had been cut over in this manner, they felled the uppermost tree so as to crash down on those just below, and these in turn would bring down others until

officers, who should become familiar with the Karen people and language, should develop a plan in accordance with which these tribes might be given reservations of land in exchange for the valuable areas now under their control. These reservations might be either in the hills or on the plains, but the Karens should be taught to cultivate them according to approved methods, in order to gain an ample livelihood. Old racial animosities and the temptation for one people to exploit another militate against entrusting such a policy to Burmese officials. It ought to be placed only in the hands of earnest, straightforward Government officials, who have gained the confidence of the Karen and are able to deal with them sympathetically but firmly. This general program would doubtless involve some outlay in supplying cattle, not to speak of competent instruction in modern agricultural methods, animal husbandry, etc.

19: Marshall M-5 (ca. 1910) 1922 AP1 Burma
Karen AP7

241

A Hillside Plot Cut Ready for Burning

343

A Paddy-bin for Storing Grain in the Field
The bamboo clappers in the foreground are for scaring away the birds.

19: Marshall M-5 (ca. 1910) 1922 AP1 Burma
Karen AP7

241 243 the whole mountain side seemed to be swept by a mighty avalanche, which resounded far and wide across the valleys, drowning the shouts of the people who were wild with excitement at seeing the culmination of the labor of weeks. The fallen timber and heaps of brush had still to lie for a fortnight or more in the hot sun until dry enough to burn.

The burning-off process, which is always a necessary part of clearing the land as mentioned above, is preceded by its appropriate ritual, in order to prevent any wandering shades or "k'las" from being consumed. As a means of warding off evil, the ritualist ties up his wrists and, as he does so, invokes the "k'las" as follows:

[539]

"Pru-u-u k'la, come back. Remain not in the forest,
Nor in the places where the jungle is newly cut.
Do not stay with evil demons.
We are about to burn our cutting.
Come back and stay in the house. Come back."

In lighting the blaze, they do so with fire from bundles of twigs that have first been sprinkled with the blood of a fowl. The burning is carefully watched, so that the fire may be kept from spreading to the surrounding forests. When bamboos are burned, the air in the hollow joints expands and bursts the stems with sharp reports. A burning field sounds like the fusillade of a battery of machine guns and affords as much delight to the Karen as a packet of firecrackers to a small boy.

When the rains have begun, the villagers begin their planting. With a sharp stick or the point of a long knife ("dah") they make tiny holes in the soft ground about a foot apart and drop into each two or three seeds of paddy. The field is now called a "hku." About this time also each family builds the little hut in its plot of ground that is to serve both as a shelter and home until the harvest shall have been gathered. It is a rude affair made of a few bamboos, either saved when the field was cleared or newly brought from the jungle, and consists of a platform, roof, and loosely fitted sides.

When the paddy has sprouted and tinged the hillside with green, another ceremony ("theh a khü") must be performed. Offerings of liquor and a fowl, which has been cooked at home, are placed upon an altar with a platform and roof, built upon six posts. The platform consists of two parts, the upper, enclosed like a miniature hut and the lower, open like a porch. Sometimes a second altar is erected upon four posts and is called "ta th' mo." Close by the first altar a flaring basket ("ta theh") is set up, which is made

19: Marshall M-5 (ca. 1910) 1922 AP1 Burma
Karen AP7

of splints woven through the split end of a bamboo, the other end of which is planted in the ground, and a similar "ta theh" is placed in front of the altar. A cup containing some rice mixed with chaff, from which projects a little bambo branch, is put upon the altar. The little branch is a "hto bo" or pole. Water is now poured over the offerings, and the cup of liquor brought from the house is placed at the foot of the altar posts. Along the path leading to the altar sharp bamboo spikes are set, following a custom said to have been handed down from earlier times, to prevent wild elephants from disturbing the offerings. When all these preparations have been completed, the spikes and the altar are smeared with the blood of a fowl, and the spirits are again addressed:

"Let this cool you and please you, O Lord of the hills, O Lord of the land, Lord of fire, Lord of heat and cold. I am making you cool and comfortable. Therefore, moderate the heat of the soil and make the paddy good. Make the rice good. Do this until the field is full."

If there is a second altar, its posts are smeared with the blood of another fowl, while the suppliant prays:

"I am offering you that which is good, that which is comforting. Therefore make the rice and paddy good, and cause it to fill the whole field."

An offering of a live chicken, with its legs tied together, is laid in the basket near the larger altar, while the following words are uttered:

"I have prepared this for you. I am doing you good. I am making it comfortable for you. When the eagle flies, the crow is afraid. When the laughing-bird laughs and the barking-deer barks, let us not fear their bad omens."

The suppliant now burns the feathers off of the dead fowls; lays down five yam leaves; cuts bits of the tip of the bill from each, treating the nails and extremities of the wings in the same way; carefully distributes the different clippings from each fowl on each of the leaves, together with a morsel of rice and, finally, disposes one of the leaves upon each of the three offering-places mentioned above, besides one upon the roof of the hut and one upon a stump in the field. Then he dips a cup of liquor and, holding it aloft, pours out a libation, saying as he does so:

"Come partake of your liquor and your rice. Make the rice and paddy better. May we work and eat in comfort and pleasure. Let

19: Marshall M-5 (ca. 1910) 1922 AP1 Burma
Karen AP7

us not be overtaken by illness. May we work until the task is finished and eat to the end."

After examining the bones of the sacrificial fowls to learn their omens, the suppliant and his family cook and eat the chickens. He then weaves a basket with large meshes and on a leaf laid in the bottom places a black pepper and sprinkles some salt. He takes a small branch from an upright-growing plant and, moving about in the growing grain, strikes both the grain and the basket, which he is carrying, and recites this prayer:

"O Guardian Bird of the field, do not let anything eat the paddy in the plot where you watch. Do not let men come in or go out. Do not permit any one who may get in to redeem himself with money, but cause him to expiate his transgression by increasing the yield of grain."

Then, cutting off the head of another fowl, he smears its blood on the basket, which he sets down in the path near the edge of the field, and returns to his house.

In many places these rites are not now so carefully observed as the above account implies. Sometimes the larger altar is dispensed with altogether, and the offerings are placed upon the little altar and in the flaring baskets. Where the elaborate ceremonial is dying out, a single fowl may be used in place of several as an oblation sufficient to please the spirits and secure a plentiful harvest. In the illustration on page 74, from a photograph taken in the Pegu Yomas, are shown the various offerings, including the live chicken that has been left on a post to die. The flaring baskets with the other offerings are also shown. The bamboo reaching above the other things was set up to mark the height which, it was hoped, the paddy might attain.

Having sought the favor of the unseen powers that preside over the growing crop, the cultivator has soon to turn his attention to the numerous enemies that prey upon his field from the neighboring jungle. Elephants, wild pigs, and a number of small animals, including rats, eat the tender plants and later feed on the ripening grain. Birds and wild fowl of various kinds are also destructive from the time the grain is in the milk. Supplication to the Guardian Bird of the field does not relieve the rice-grower from the need of fencing his plot with reeds and bamboos, setting traps and snares, and erecting scarecrows and clappers to keep devouring creatures from his grain. Little hoeing is done, but the Karen and his whole family occupy themselves in watching the growing paddy, operating

19: Marshall M-5 (ca. 1910) 1922 AP1 Burma
Karen AP7

243 carried to the threshing-floor, which is near the hut or, in the case of the fields lying near the village, is just outside the village gate. If they should be left in the field, they might not be there next morning. The pile of sheaves is always guarded, some of the men spending the night on it. They also take the precaution to hang up a gourd with a hole in it which, with a breeze blowing, emits sounds like mumbled voices.

The threshing-floor is a plot of ground perhaps a hundred feet square, or larger in proportion to the quantity of grain to be trodden out, which has been packed hard and flat by leading cattle around on it, or by using a cart or a drag for the purpose. (See p. 89.) A smoother surface is secured, not unlike that of a dirt tennis-court, by covering the floor with a coating of cow-dung. The name applied to the threshing-floor is "t'law," which is a corruption of the Burmese word "talin." The paddy sheaves are piled up in tiers around the "t'law" so as to shed water, should untimely showers fall before they are trodden out. For the threshing, however, the sheaves are distributed evenly over the floor to a depth of two feet with the heads of the grain on top. Banks of sheaves support the sides of the layers. The process of separating the grain from the heads is a tedious one. From two to a dozen cattle are tied together, and a boy or girl or, if neither of these is at hand, a woman takes the nose rope of the animal nearest him and stands in the center of the floor. The threshing often begins soon after midnight and continues until sunrise, the cattle being constantly prodded on their apparently endless round. At the conclusion of the tiresome task the other members of the family appear, remove the bulk of the straw, sweep up the smaller fragments, and begin to winnow the grain. This is accomplished either by holding it aloft in a basket and letting the wind blow off the chaff as it falls, or by pouring the grain and chaff from a platform four or five feet into a loosely-woven tray swung from a tripod of bamboos. To insure that all the chaff and dust are driven off, men and women fan the grain with closely-woven trays as it falls upon the pile. (See p. 91.)

[241] The winnowing process being finished, an offering for "Hpi Bi Yaw" [6] (the Karen Ceres) is placed on the apex of the pile. Lest any one should try to help himself to the grain, little tufts of charred straw are put at close intervals around the pile, after which those who have been doing all this dusty work unwrap their heads, repair to the village well or tank and indulge in a refreshing bath.

[6] See pp. 84, 98, 228

19: Marshall M-5 (ca. 1910) 1922 AP1 Burma
Karen AP7

No one can presume to predict the outcome of the present unsettled conditions. We can only hope that better days are in store for the cultivators, whether Burman or Karen.

If, before the war, a man owned his field and cattle without encumberance or other debts, he could till some twenty acres and make a comfortable living for himself and family. If, however, he was under the necessity of borrowing money and hiring men and cattle, he could hardly keep his head above water.

There are some Karens who own large fields. They may have acquired them by careful management, by purchase, or by foreclosing loans. Many of these proprietors make a business of hiring out their fields to men who cultivate them at a rental of from ten to fifteen baskets of paddy per acre, the cultivator supplying his own materials and help. In case the owner has oxen, he rents them at the usual price. In addition, he usually makes a loan of cash to his tenant, on which he gets a big return, namely, a hundred baskets of paddy for the sum of fifty rupees for six months. If the tenant borrows from a money-lender, he has to pay anywhere from fifteen to fifty percent a year for it.

On the plains the cultivator is almost entirely dependent on his single crop of paddy. If high water has washed out his first settings, there is not time enough left to raise other produce after the water has disappeared. Under these circumstances they sometimes plant sesame, but it requires only a little less time to mature than paddy. The lack of water in the dry season renders cultivation impossible without extensive irrigation.

Along the river-bottoms may be found a few plantain groves, patches of tobacco, sugar-cane, or vegetables; but these are unusual sights. They may add a little to the cultivator's income. But very few persons derive their chief support from such gardens.

The Karen on the plains do not observe the old religious customs of the hill people. Many times they resort to Burmese soothsayers to prognosticate the proper times for planting, reaping, and other tasks. Not a few, however, follow the old ceremonies in greater or less part. A ceremonial similar to "theh a hkü" in the hills [1] is observed on the plains where it is designated "mo a si." It is performed when the paddy is set out. Offerings are seldom seen along the paths in this region, but when the paddy has been winnowed an offering is made to "Hpi Bi Yaw" by transferring the rim of earth around a crab's burrow to the summit of the pile of

[1] See ante, pp. 76, 79.

19: Marshall M-5 (ca. 1910) 1922 AP1 Burma
Karen AP7

paddy. A few paddy heads or even a few leaves of the ginger plant may be inserted in the burrow as a talisman to make the supply of paddy last the year out. The oblation on the threshing-floor or a similar one is then put on top of the paddy in the bin.

The Karen who is untouched by outside influence does not like to take up any other occupation than that of raising paddy. He regards his other pursuits as occasional and accessory, including the gathering of forest products, such as stick-lac and wild honey and the sale of fruit from the few mango trees he may possess. He has not been found satisfactory as a day-laborer or coolie for any continued work; he avoids hiring out as a cartman and does not succeed as a petty trader. In more extensive business he has achieved success in only a few instances. With the advantages of education, however, a few have prospered in commercial life and other callings. Many have entered Government service and risen to positions of trust. A large percentage of those who have passed through the schools are clerks and teachers. One of the largest department stores in Rangoon employs Karen clerks with satisfaction, besides Europeans. Educated Karen girls take employment as teachers and nurse-maids, and recently a few have been engaging in clerical work.

TURNING THE BUFFALOES OUT TO GRAZE
These heavy animals are easily managed by Karen children, but are easily frightened by the presence of strangers.

19. Marshall M-5 (ca. 1910) 1922 AP1 Burma
Karen AP7

681 peace gives a wide space; love of evil gives a narrow space. If we
627 want evil, it is present even before all the water has run out of a
577 vessel that has been upset."

The people were warned not to commit fornication or adultery.
684 When they married they were to do so openly. They were told that
671 if they were guilty of fornication, their sons and their daughters
241 would die and the country would be defiled and destroyed on their account. The begetting of illegitimate children was declared to be displeasing to "Thi Hko Mü Xa," the Lord of heaven and earth, and to be the cause of irregularity of the rains, bad crops, failure of seeds and vegetables to germinate, disappointment in the hunt, poverty, and slavery. On the discovery of illicit relations between two of the villagers they were brought before the elders, who required the guilty persons to buy and kill a hog and each of them to dig a furrow in the ground with a leg of the animal. They were then to fill the furrows with the blood of the hog, after which they were to scratch the soil into little holes and mounds while repeating the following prayer: "Lord of heaven and earth, God of the mountains and hills. I have destroyed the productiveness of the country. Do not be angry with me, do not hate me; but have mercy on me and pity me. I now repair the mountains. I heal the hills and the streams with my hands. May there be no failure of crops, no unsuccessful labor, or unfortunate efforts in my country. Let them be dissipated on the distant horizon. Make the paddy fruitful and the rice abundant. Cause the vegetables to flourish. If we cultivate but little, may we obtain but little." When each of the guilty pair had completed this ceremonial, they said that they had made reparation and returned to their houses. In Shwegyin, however, such culprits were driven from the village and required to live outside.[1]

Among the Bwes it was customary to fine adulterers, unless they were single or widowed; but if a wife was involved, her paramour was compelled to pay a fine to the injured husband and take the woman as his wife, the former husband being considered divorced and free to marry again with the money he had received. In case a husband was found guilty of adultery, the woman concerned must pay a fine to the injured wife, who became free to contract another marriage.

[785] If the crops were poor, the villagers suspected that it was due to secret sins of this sort and felt the need of making offerings to

[1] See pp. 192, 257.

19: Marshall M-5 (ca. 1910) 1922 AP1 Burma
Karen AP7

appease the Lord of heaven and earth and to find out the guilty persons.

On the subject of stealing the exhortation of the elders was not to steal, destroy, defraud, or act dishonestly. Such deeds are by no means secret. Even though unconfessed, they become manifest in the ordeal by water and in that of ascending a tree. The God of heaven sees. The Lord of the mountains and hills, "Thi Hko Mü Xa," sees. If one is hungry, one should work, should bend the back. If one wants fish, one should use the hand-net. If one desires game, let one repair to the jungle for it. Families are to be fed in this way, not by stealing or by running into debt.

A person who had been caught stealing might be let off, if it was his first offense and he restored the stolen property and promised to reform. If, however, he became a confirmed thief, he was sold into slavery. In some parts of the Toungoo district it was not uncommon for one guilty of stealing to pay the penalty with his life. If positive proof was lacking and there was doubt as to his guilt, the ordeal by water was resorted to.

Murder was, of course, utterly condemned in the sayings of the elders, for "man is not like the beasts. He has a Lord and Master. We are the children of Thi Hko, of Y'wa who created us. Therefore, do not kill one another." The murderer will be surrendered to the Lord of the lands and will be put to death. He can not escape. His body will be left naked in the fields, and the vultures will devour it. "These things," the elders declare, "have we seen with our own eyes, and we know them, and they have often happened among us." However, the circumstances under which a murder was committed were taken into account. A homicide at a drunken feast was considered an accident, for it was thought that the one guilty of the crime would not have committed it had he been sober. No cause for an action existed in such a case.

Men killed while taking part in a foray were to be redeemed, that is, a fine was to be paid for them, unless the leader had been excused from such payment in advance.[4] Likewise, the accidental death of a man during a trading, hunting, or other trip undertaken at the request of another, was chargeable to the latter, because otherwise it would not have occurred.

The recognized way of bringing to justice an offender who was accused of causing the death of another, was for the near relatives

[4] See p. 151.

19: Marshall M-5 (ca. 1910) 1922 AP1 Burma
Karen AP7

789

kind, involving the use of certain rites, practices, and conceptions by which one tries to protect one's self against unknown powers and forces. White magic may be divided in turn into three varieties, namely, defensive, productive, and prognostic magic.

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As suggested by its name, defensive magic is employed to safeguard one from injury and to prolong one's life. Charms are used, such as the wild boar's tusk without a nerve cavity, to prevent the possessor from being wounded by the firing of a gun or the bolt from a crossbow. The tusk charm is called "soh."

The boar's tusk must be the tusk of an old and fierce animal (for the older the animal, the smaller the cavity), which was, therefore, hard to kill. This, according to Karen belief, renders its owner equally hard to destroy. Sometimes the tooth of an ancestor is worn, in order to gain the reputed courage and strength of the latter. A female wears such a charm around her neck. A man may wear it set in a finger-ring. The latter method of wearing the tooth would not serve in the case of a woman or girl, for unavoidably it would be brought in contact with her skirt and that would be disrespectful to the dead, thus destroying the value of the charm. A lock of hair or the parings of nails from a corpse are also frequently worn to prolong the life of the wearer.

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A certain plant of magic power, called "k' thi baw tho" or "tiger medicine" is said by the Karen to confer such immunity upon him who uses it that he may enter a den of fierce tigers at any time without the least fear.[4] It is also reported that by burying the root of this magic plant at the bottom of a hole seven cubits deep, pulling the root up with one's teeth, and jumping out—according to one of my informants—even when men are standing around the opening with sticks in their hands, one will be turned into a man-eating tiger and spend the remainder of his life in the jungle composing verses and springing down upon unwary persons. Certainly, one who can believe that a man can leap out of so deep a hole and dodge the blows of his fellows at the top, will experience no difficulty in believing the rest of this story.

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A second form of white magic is what is defined as productive magic. It has to do with increasing a crop, rendering a family prosperous, or adding children to the family circle. Certain plants of the ginger family *(Zingiberaceae)* growing in Burma are supposed to be endowed with the power of bringing a good crop production. Consequently, they are set out at the entrances of the

[4] *Karen Thesaurus*, new ed., Vol. I, pp. 643, ff.

1R: Marshall M-5 (ca. 1910) 1932 AP1 Burma
Karen AP7

fields. A native reported to me an example of productive magic in connection with the finding of a spiral coil of heavy brass wire by his great aunt. The coil was from four to six inches in diameter and was unearthed by the aunt while digging a large yam in the jungle. The coil was carried home, but at first brought only misfortune. However, in the full moon of "Thadingyut" (Burmese for October) the aunt hit upon the happy idea of offering the blood of a red cock to the spiral coil, and in due time the family became prosperous. A failure to make the annual offering was followed by ill-fortune. The offering must not be made by an unchaste person or by one who had fallen out of the house during the year. The coil, which sometimes assumed human form, must not be approached too closely. It was believed to possess the power of foretelling the future when it appeared in human shape.

The red and yellow varieties of the flowering plant, cockscomb (*Amaranthus*), which grow abundantly in the hills, are reputed to have a beneficial effect on the crops. The red variety has the added virtue, according to various tales, of dazzling the eyes of pursuing spirits, which are so attracted by it that they forget any evil intent they may have had against persons or objects. A root taken from a red cockscomb found growing in a field three years after cultivation, if bound up in the turban of a husband, will prevent the wife from conceiving, according to Karen lore. The opposite result is attained by the women of Shwegyin by wearing the bones of the "Ta t'hkaw hkaw" (a one-legged female demon) as a necklace. They buy these bones from the Brecs.[1]

Black magic is bad magic or witchcraft. The Karen speak of it as "ta ho ta yaw" or sometimes as "ta ho ta lo," meaning to work evil on a person and thereby cause his death. It is difficult to learn very much about the practices involved in the art, for those who exercise it are prone to keep their methods secret, revealing them, if at all, to one or two intimates only and thus preventing their secrets from losing their potency. By blowing on a cup of water that is later to be handed to the intended victim, the worker of black magic imparts to it a baleful action that will cause him to sicken and die. A quid of betel blown upon in the same way may be thrown at the person intended to be harmed, and, if it strikes him, will produce the fatal result desired. Some sorcerers pretend to have the power of inducing a lingering disease, which after a year or two will terminate the life of their victims. Other methods

[1] See Chapter XXIII on Supernatural and Mythical Beings, p. 333.

19: Marshall M-5 (ca. 1910) 1922 AP1 Burma
Karen AP7

784
777 A number of tabus are associated with signs of bad luck. Many of these signs are incidental to going on journeys. For example, if one sneezes on rising to start on a journey, or on the way hears the cry of a barking deer, or sees one of these animals or a snake crossing his path, or hears of somebody's death, or sees a civet-cat near his path, he must give up his excursion until another day. Otherwise, he will meet with an accident, fall sick, or experience some misfortune in his family. It was once the custom of those who were setting out on a trading journey to repeat the following words:

[539]

"I am going to———— to trade.
O Snakes, do not cross my path.
O Barking-deer and Rabbits, do not hinder me.
I am going across my land and along my path.
There are many other paths on the earth.
O white Civet-cat, do not hinder me."

If divination shows that one's illness is due to having taken the wrong road on a recent journey, that road rests under a tabu for a period of from four to seven days. The branch of a tree is laid across the forbidden trail where it leaves the main path, and no one will enter it until the tabu is lifted. This is called the tabu of the road ("ta dü kleh"). When a death occurs in a village, the death tabu ("ta dü ta thi ta pgha") is observed until the burial ceremonies are over. Children and persons of weak constitution are kept from witnessing the removal of a corpse from the village, inasmuch as their "k'las" are said to be easily enticed away by that of the dead person. On an elephant hunt it is forbidden to mention the name of the beast, lest its spirit should hear and take alarm, thus destroying the chance of success in the chase. Instead it is called "ta hpa do" or "the great one." Other signs of ill luck surely bring their tabus. If one does not return from work on hearing the wildcat's cry, one will die. No one should live in a house whose owner dies, or by which a green pigeon flew while the house was building.

784
● 241 The observance of certain tabus are regarded as conducive to the production of good crops or of prosperity in other forms. When the people have made the offering, "theh a hku," they must refrain from going into their fields for seven days. Otherwise, the demons will follow them and spoil their crops. This tabu is known as "ta dü hkü ta dü theh." During the dark and the full of the moon, in February and July, respectively, when people say that "it is hot," meaning that conditions are unfavorable, they avoid work for

[805]

19: Marshall M-5 (ca. 1910) 1922 AP1 Burma
Karen AP7

the purpose of improving the conditions and keeping their crops from being ruined. Failure to observe this custom brings disappointment ("t' kle t htwa"), for one's labor will be worse than useless. On the plains, where they prepare a dirt threshing-floor after the Burman style, it used to be prohibited to drive a cart across it or to walk on it with shoes on. In other sections, where the threshing is done on a great mat, no one may step on it but the members of the family who take part in the work. The succulent shoots of vegetables, which are grown with the paddy, must not be cut with a sharp knife or other instrument, inasmuch as cutting would endanger the "k'la" or life principle of the paddy and scare away the demons that preside over the fields. Both the vegetables and their shoots, the latter being largely used for greens, must be plucked with the fingers. Another tabu prevents the eating of flesh during harvest-time. Any family who should transgress this precept would find, it is believed, that their supply of rice had vanished from the storage bin.

The following examples of tabus relating to domestic animals may be cited. If a sow or bitch has a litter composed only of females, they must all be killed. When less than three chicks are hatched from a nest of eggs, they must be killed. So also must the chick whose down dries fast to the feathers of the mother hen. A crowing hen is likewise doomed to death. These phenomena are supposed to be signs of weakness in the creatures concerned, for which some offended demon is responsible. Such weakness must not be allowed to spread.

Certain tabus contribute to preserve the integrity of the family through the female line. One of these prevents any outsider from entering a house where the family is celebrating the "Bgha" feasts. Indeed, a tabu debars from such gatherings the men who have married into the family, while those who are privileged to attend must remain in the house during the performance of the rites.

On the plains, where the Karen villagers build separate houses after the manner of the Burmans, persons are forbidden to drive their carts through the village road close enough to the houses to bump against the supporting posts. This tabu, which, in the eyes of a Westerner, partakes of the nature of a town ordinance, is enforced upon the offender by the imposing of a fine, namely, four annas in money or a fowl, payable to the heads of the household con-

25: Ferrars E-5 (ca. 1890) 1901 APl Burma
Shan AP11
Karen AP7

S 101 [796]
K 101 131
K [361]

321. KAREN VILLAGE.

K •241

in small numbers, chiefly as pilgrims to the Buddhist shrines, of which the chief is the Shwe Dagôn, in Rangoon (p. 188).

The Karéns are the most important hill-race of the country, and best exemplify the mode of life of the quasi-aboriginal tribes, whom Burmans, Taláings, and Shans have kept out of the plain-land. The "white Karéns," Sghaw (*Sghrraw*) and Pwo, occupy the mountains between Burma and Siam. They have colonies in mountains far to the east and west, and have also spread into the plains adjoining. They call themselves *Baganyáw* (*Bghrraganyáw*), and call the Burmans *Baydw*. The Burmans call them *Kayín*, and familiarly *Tha-ngè-dyín*—playmate, in much the same way as we say "Jack Burman" and "John Chinaman." The Karéns get their living by making hill-forest clearings (*taungya*), on which they raise one crop, and remove to fresh sites every season.

K 177

On the fringe of the mountain tracts the Karéns are more or less Burmanized, and practise Buddhism, being attracted by the prestige of the religion, with its great festivals in which everyone is free to share,—especially now that they can mingle in the towns without fear of their quondam oppressors. The barbarous *Mgwin*, which the Burmans themselves are beginning to disuse, is one of the first marks of the contact of the Karén with the dominant race. The Karéns settled in the lowlands are known as Taláing-Kayín, and Bamá-Kayín. The men know Burmese, and dress like Burmans.

K [854]

322. KAREN MOTHER AND BABE.

The Karén is noted for truthfulness and chastity. The former characteristic is probably to be accounted for by absence of coercive *régime*, their society being, as Macpherson says of the Khonds, pervaded by

K 181

25: Ferrars E-5 (ca. 1890) 1901 APl Burma
Karen AP7

181
[231]
[622]

333. KARENS BRINGING ELEPHANTS TO MARKET.

[736]

"a spirit of equality, and governed by the moral influence of its natural heads alone." (Herbert Spencer, *Principles of Sociology*, Vol. I., p. 407.) The chief of these elders is called *Saukè;* he gives his name to the village. The faults of the Karéns are their dirt, their addiction to drink, and a degree of superstition so extreme that a motherless infant is refused adoption for fear of turning the wrath of a vengeful demon upon the foster-mother. In epidemics of cholera and small-pox the Karéns abandon their villages in panic fear. The Karéns are shorter but of stouter build than the Burmans and Talaings, and of much fairer complexion. But their name of "white" Karén is derived from their clothing. Very characteristic is their short upper arm. Young people of splendid physique may be seen; but the conditions of life are so hard, and malaria is so prevalent in the forests, that the population remains stationary—by the census of 1891, 633,600. The toilsome Karén finds lightness of heart in the liquor he brews, a remarkable contrast to the vivacious and abstinent Burman. The contrast is borne out in the dreary wail of the Karén music and the bright and exuberant cadences of the Burmese. Karén children grow independent very young (No. 355), and begin their heavy outdoor labour soon. Early physical exertion possibly accounts for the second moral quality noted above. The hill-cultivation is greatly at the mercy of the seasons, from burning-time in April to harvest in October. The hardship is aggravated by a superstition of divination-bones (*Kyeyye*) which often tabooes the most eligible sites. Scarcely have the crops been garnered than the clearing of a fresh site for the village begins.

[164]
[144]
[533]
[866]
[487]
• 241
[784]

334. KARENS GOING OUT TO WORK.

25: Ferrars E-5 (ca. 1890) 1901 APl Burma
Karen AP7

341
361
•241

241

338. KARENS SOWING THEIR CROPS.

The primitive Karéns in the remote hills build one or more huge bamboo barracks, partitioned off for the different families. Those more in contact with civilization build separate huts. When the new settlement is complete, the Karéns, both men and women, carouse. From February to April each household is hard at work clearing its cultivation-plot of four to eight acres of forest on the hill-side. Bamboo forest is preferred; occasional trees of large size are killed by ringing, or are lopped to get rid of their shade; many trees are felled (No. 105). The lumber is left to dry for burning, till the rain clouds begin to gather. Sometimes an unexpected break of the monsoon prevents the burning and renders the whole labour futile. After the first burn, the residue is stacked against the standing trees and burned again. When the rains have set in, the seed is sown. A man goes in advance and makes rows of shallow holes with a hoe mounted on a long and tapering bamboo staff; the free or wide end is furnished with openings in the side, which cause the bamboo to emit a musical note at each stroke. Women with seed-bags follow; they put in the rice and the secondary crops (*hnan*, cotton, and, in a few localities, teak-seed for the government, No. 244), in alternate rows, and close the soil. Watchers' huts are built, and the birds scared till the seed has sprouted. From that time till the crop is thick, it has to be assiduously weeded. If the cultivator falls sick for a fortnight the weeds gain ground, and he cannot come up with the work again. The clearings have to be fenced to protect them against deer and pigs, and the rats have to be kept down by lines of traps which often extend for miles. In years of bamboo seeding (p. 112) the rats multiply to

337. KAREN CROP-WATCHER'S HUT.

25: Ferrars E-5 (ca. 1890) 1901 APl Burma
Karen AP7

241

[251]

399. KARENS CUTTING THEIR CROP.

such an extent that they destroy whole crops and stocks of corn and produce famine. Towards harvest time birds have to be scared again. The rice crop is generally ripe before the last rains fall. A chance break is taken advantage of to cut, dry, and thresh the corn, which is got under cover in a bin on the *taungya*, or *punzo*, as it is called when done with. The secondary crops ripen later. Cucumbers, pumpkins, marrows, brinjals, and other coarse vegetables, and sometimes tomatoes, are sown on the margins and along the pathways. In a good season the Karéns get about double the quantity of grain they need for living. The whole of the secondary crop is for trade. In the moist ravines they cultivate the betel-palm and betel-vine, and they have taken to orange gardening at the foot of the hills. They also collect the wild betel-vine and honey by climbing high trees (No. 362); the tree-ladder is made by driving bamboo spikes into the wood. The only honey of Burma is wild; but bees frequent the limestone caves to such a degree that in some places the right to collect honey and wax in them is farmed out. Honey sells for ten annas and wax for two and a half rupees a viss. The staple food of the Karéns is rice. They make a curry in the Burman way; with it they eat *ngapi*, salt fish or fresh fish, or the flesh of pig and deer, especially the "small deer" they trap at the *taungya*. They keep goats, poultry and pigs, which latter are the scavengers of the villages. But the chief purpose for which these animals are bred is to be killed and offered to the *nats*, who have to be propitiated on all occasions. At every village site and clearing for cultivation a

[438]

[222]

262

[231]

782

399. KAREN WOMAN COOKING.